DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH GENERAL STEPHEN SPEAKES, DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR PROGRAMS, U.S. ARMY G-8 MODERATOR: LINDY KAISER, PUBLIC AFFAIRS, U.S. ARMY TIME: 1:32 P.M. EDT DATE: THURSDAY, MAY 29, 2008

(Note: Please refer to www.dod.mil for more information.)

CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS): Okay, Lindy.

MS. KAISER: Great, well, thank you so much everyone for being on the call-in.

Thank you, Mr. Holt, for all of your coordination.

Again, we have Lt. General Stephen Speakes, he is the deputy chief of staff for G-8. He is here with us to talk Army modernization and future combat systems. I'll turn the floor over to him for a few opening remarks. When he's done with those remarks, I'll go ahead and call on all you all out there to ask a few questions of him.

But, we'll start out with remarks from General Speakes. Thank you so much for participating in the calls. GEN. SPEAKES: Well, Lindy, thanks a lot for the chance to be here, and to everybody who's joining us today. Thank you very, very much for taking the time out of, out of your busy days to join us.

I'm thrilled to be able to talk a little bit about Army modernization, and specifically about future combat systems. I've had a chance to take a quick look at some of the blogs that talk a little bit about future combat systems and Army modernization. And I'm struck by the need that we have to make our case to you and to the broader Defense media about what it is that we're trying to do and why it's so important.

The first point that I'd make is that we do have a vision. The vision was first put in place by Army leaders right at the end of the turn of the decade -- about 1999, when we started talking in General Shinseki's ear about objective force. Since then we've done two things: We've continued to refine the reality of how we see soldiers and units fighting in today's modern battlefield. But we've also seen that we have an important new concept that is working, that we need to essentially give capability to, and that's the modular force.

The way we're going to empower the modular force is through Future Combat Systems. What has changed, and what has shown the promise of FCS over time? First, what we had to do -- that I think is lost to many out in the American public, is reenergize the Defense establishment that is going to give

us the research and development and technology that will essentially replace Cold War-era systems and capability with the kinds of capability that we're going to use to fight in today's modern battlefield.

The fact that the decade of the '90s was a period of underinvestment in Defense meant that we had to restart critical research and development, and start the birth of technologies that we know we needed. So, what we had was a period of four to five years of just heavy investment.

And, frankly, people asked, where's the return on my investment? The answer was, it took us time to get started; it took us time to develop the capabilities that we'll now start to see the results from. And I'll talk about them in a minute. So, the first point was we had to start a brand new concept of research, development and technology investment. We're starting to see the results of that now.

The second point is, that we had to have the -- (audio interference) -- The new vision of how we're going to fight said that we're going to extend the battlefield -- (audio interference) -- In practical terms what that meant is that what we know -- many of us, as former soldiers or current soldiers, is that we expected the soldiers to make contact with the enemy by bumping into the battle.

It was called "movement to contact." That is, we all know is that it -- (audio interference) -- shed soldier's blood to develop a situation that enables us to then go forward to develop -- (audio interference) -- don't want to do that. What we want is a concept that says, through both manned and unmanned systems, aerial and ground systems, primarily through robotics, that we're able to extend the battlefield and also reduce the risk to soldiers. It doesn't mean we're going to be invulnerable on the battlefield -- (audio interference) -- extend the battlefield and reduce the risk to soldiers.

Inherent in all of that is the concept of the network. The network -- when you talked to people about the network three or four years ago, when I first started doing this, people's eyes would glaze over -- they didn't understand it. Now, thanks to commercials, for example, Verizon with their concept of "the network behind us," we all "get it." -- (audio interference) --

MS. KAISER: General, can I interrupt you?

Could somebody mute, in their background, with --

MR. HOLT: Yeah, I think somebody's --

MS. KAISER: -- (inaudible) -- it's cutting the General in and out.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

Sorry, General --

GEN. SPEAKES: No, I'm sorry. I could hear it too and it's kind of distracting. I certainly apologize for it as well. I hope it's not us.

MR. HOLT: I don't think so. I think it's -- we just had somebody -- not on you, so.

GEN. SPEAKES: Okay. From our perspective then, what we're going to try to do is we're going to try to extend the battlefield through the network. The network now is showing promise. In other words, what we're seeing in combat today is that we don't empower headquarters. We used to empower corps headquarters, division headquarters, now we're moving beyond that down to battalion and even company level, and ultimately our vision is to bring the network to the soldier.

And people understand the utility of it because when we see a young American today with their cell phone, we see exactly what today's soldier on the battlefield wants to be able to do -- exchange voice with anybody, from anywhere; exchange text, if necessary; and visual images. Those are the critical capabilities that we want to now move from soldier to soldier across the battlefield, wherever it is we have American soldiers in action. So the concept then, of robotics, empowered by the network, all designed to reduce soldiers' vulnerability and increase soldiers' situational awareness, is fundamental to what FCS is all about.

Now notice, to this point, I haven't even begun to talk about any kind of a common platform or replacement for the aging tank Bradley and M113 armored personnel carrier. I think that's appropriate that the last thing I'll talk to you about in this, in this sequence of describing Army modernization and future combat systems is to talk about the new common platform that we're going to bring to the Army.

If you happened to take a look at some of the Press releases since last Friday, General Casey and Senator Inhofe introduced or rolled out the first of what will be eight common vehicle types. For all of us who have been a part of the Army over the last 30 or 40 years, we knew one thing: That if you were a school commandant -- for infantry, armor, artillery, and the list goes on, you had your flagship vehicle. Your flagship vehicle had very little in common with other systems from other school commandants, except the same color paint.

(Audio interference) -- Everything else in it essentially was different. It had a different mechanic; it had a different repair parts system; it had a different operating system that required unique driver's training, maintenance training, you know the deal -- a completely unique system that didn't have a synchronized concept of employment on the battlefield, different rates of reply, different rates of employment.

And so now what we have done is gone to a system that is 70 percent common. That has enormous potential to leverage now our ability to take the supporting part of our force and move it from the supporters to the actual combat formation we want -- boots on the ground, combat capability. And so that's what Future Combat System gives us in this common platform, is the ability to -- (audio interference) -- want to harmonize our capability.

Inherent in all of that is an idea that says the Cold War era platform isn't the way we want to fight this next fight. What we're seeing today is, number one, no system's invulnerable; number two, that we have new techniques and new technologies that have much greater promise than what we brought to the Army in the last -- 1970- 1980.

What does that mean? It means that we're going to have removable armor. So that on this common platform, as we grow and evolve armor technology -- instead of just stacking more armor on top of armor, we'll bring new capabilities.

In the case of this MGV, or a manned ground vehicle, we now already have three, and potentially four, different levels of armor protection we're going to bring over time. That's very, very important because it says that it as we continue to grow and evolve technology, we will grow and improve the quality of the protection without adding tons and tons more armor to those vehicles. The other thing we're going to do is we're going to power it in a, in a new way. Many of you know that today's tank is a very consumptive piece of equipment. It gets gallons to the mile, instead of the reverse. When we're paying $4-plus a gallon, who in the world thinks we can continue to operate a tank that operates with that kind of consumption? We're going to go to hybrid electric like the rest of the world is doing.

There again, the Army had this vision five years ago. We have continued to stick to that. Hybrid electric is the way we're going to power this new system. The other thing that we'd like to emphasize is that although the basic design for this new combat system was built and designed as a platform back four or five years ago, we have continued to grow and evolve it over time.

So, the lessons of the IED battlefield that we've seen over the last three or four years have now been reflected in the important changes to the design of that vehicle. -- (inaudible) -- done a couple of things, they've added more passive protection and active protections to take on this evolving threat.

So, what you're seeing then is a system that is continuously and consciously changing and evolving over time as we learn more about how to fight in today's modern battlefield. -- (audio interference) -- today we'll also change tomorrow as we see that threat in the evolution of the battlefield change.

Now we're -- some of our critics don't like that. And our answer is, we're not going to be stuck on stupid.

If we did something for a good reason five years ago that is not right today, we'll go ahead and move forward and change that design plan in order to make it relevant for today and tomorrow.

So this is a whole new concept of acquisition. It's a whole new concept of technology development. The Army's never done it before. The Army, frankly, ought to be applauded for having the courage to make the change, to go with a common concept that unifies all of our tactical army, that empowers us with a network that the rest of the world is using to create commercial success, and that the Army has enormous potential that we're now seeing in our first cases at the Army Evaluation Task Force at Fort Bliss, Texas. That's the new forefront of Army modernization.

We're bringing capabilities there. At that location what you're seeing then is combat-proven soldiers who are testing and evaluating this capability. So we're not going to hand stuff to soldiers that hasn't been tested and evaluated by soldiers who know what combat is and are willing to give us a pass. So that's the other part of it. As the American taxpayer, you ought to be comfortable that it's not somebody other than a soldier -- (audio break).

MR. HOLT: Okay. It sounds like somebody's not on mute again.

GEN. SPEAKES: Hello?

MR. HOLT: General Speakes, are you still with us?

MS. KAISER: We're still here.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

MS. KAISER: If they have those FCS hybrid technologies, though, it wouldn't be that loud. That engine wouldn't be roaring that loud. (Laughter.)

We'll go ahead and I'll go through the list based on what Mr. Holt provided me earlier and ask questions.

Again, due to the number of people we have on this call and time limitations, I don't think I'll get to everybody, but I will take as many questions as possible via e-mail afterwards.

And also, again, due to the time limitations, you'll ask one question. If you have a follow-up, clarification question based on your earlier question, that's fine. But only one question as I state your name, not just two random topics.

So Noah with Danger Room, do you have a question?

Q I sure do.

General, thanks for taking the time to do this.

Back in March, the GAO said about the network -- which is at the heart of FCS, as you've talked about -- said it is not yet clear if or when the information network can be developed, built or even demonstrated.

So if the network is so important, why is it so far behind?

GEN. SPEAKES: I'm glad to answer that question.

I was out at Fort Bliss, Texas here about a month-and-a-half ago. Block one of our initial build of this network is already functioning. What that means then is is what we're moving is images from a sensor through a processing center called ICS to a shooter -- in this case what we call rockets in a box, which is a missile that travels 40 kilometers.

So what we're already doing is sharing one image, a common image, so that we have one integrated view of the battlefield. This is the first of approximately three increments of capability that we're going to provide.

You see, our answer is we understand what the network is. We have learned from people like Bill Gates. We're going to grow and evolve this over the course of time in increments and we're going to deliver increments to the AETF -- the Army Evaluation Task Force. We're going to submit it for evaluation. Then if it proves, we're going to go ahead and issue it in spinouts. We expect the very first increment of this capability will go out in spinout one, which will be arriving in the field in fiscal year '11.

So our answer is we're on track. This is a very sophisticated process. We've got a world-class team that is building the software. We're making heavy reliance on commercial technology and commercial software where it's already

used -- used very successfully by similar kinds of development. And we think we're on track.

Q So sorry, just a follow-up there: So are you saying that the GAO doesn't have access to what you guys are doing? That they're mistaken? You know, why would the GAO write this? Presumably they know what you're up to.

GEN. SPEAKES: Yes. And very frankly, we're in a continuing dialogue with the GAO, because to us it's very important that the GAO see us and understand this. And then, I'll also be frank, where they have had frequent and very constructive criticism of us, we take it very seriously. And frankly, we've responded to their concerns. In this case, what we're talking about is the early proof now that what we're trying to do with all of this code actually results in capability. What they are talking about is the results of work they did prior to our delivery of this capability.

So we believe that we'll continue to show both the GAO and other critics that now that we've gotten beyond the initial phase of development, that when we actually put capabilities in the field, we can show the results that the American taxpayer wants.

MS. : Thanks, Noah.

Now, does John Wagner with Blackfive have a question?

Q I'm sorry, who'd you call on?

MS. : John with Black Five.

Q General -- Major General Wagner again.

GEN. SPEAKES: John, good to hear your voice.

Q I have one question: I had an interview this weekend with a lieutenant who just rotated back in from patrolling Baghdad. And one of the problems that he has with rolling out this new technology is the training sequence in prepping out for this new technology.

For example, his company commanders would not release UAVs to be used by the field troops, because they just didn't feel they had the training to capture this. And I know FCS has a plan to address training as they roll this stuff out.

How's that progressing for, you know, getting those guys prepared as they go into the field?

GEN. SPEAKES: John, I think the first challenge that we have is we have been late to need with equipment to support deploying soldiers. We are trying to reverse that over time.

The first point is, we hit this war, as you know, without many of the capabilities that we discovered in war and we needed. So when we found what the shortfall was, we rushed capabilities to the field. And like MRAP today, like UAVs, in many cases what we're doing is we're fielding it to soldiers in combat. Then as we actually equip capabilities that work and prove in combat, we then continue to develop them and put them in the hands of soldiers en route to combat.

What that means then is we're trying to work where we can get the right kind of training and the right kind of environment back here in the continental United States so that when soldiers actually go to war they're comfortable and confident with the equipment that they've used and trained. The more density of equipment we have, the more time we have, the more we can set up the training routines that give soldiers confidence.

Q I have one follow-up to that: Is the FCS rollout still on at 2013, I think it is?

GEN. SPEAKES: Well --

Q Or have they been trying to move that up?

GEN. SPEAKES: No. What we'll do is the first spinout of FCS right now is scheduled to hit the field in fiscal year '11. And we're holding firm with that. And the first capabilities that we're going to put in that spinout are now under evaluation at Fort Bliss, Texas.

So the concept is here that we evaluate in fiscal year '08 and '09, go through final validation and testing to essentially get the authority from the Congress and the administration to proceed, and then build it in '10 and issue it in '11. And then what you're going to see is, we believe somewhere around every two years, we're going to roll out more spinouts.

We believe that the first common variance of the vehicles that are going to be a part of the next fiscal year brigade will appear in about FY '13 and we'll have an entire brigade's worth of them between FY '15 and '17. So what you're going to see is as fast as we can build and deliver the capability and prove that it can meet combat soldiers' testing, we'll then issue it to soldiers in the field.

We'll see it over time. It'll begin in FY '11.

MS. KAISER: Great.

David Axe with warisboring.com, do you have a question?

Q I sure do.

Hi, General. Thanks for taking the time to talk to us.

So some in Congress are skeptical that we can -- never mind if it's feasible -- but skeptical that we can even afford FCS at a price tag of $200 billion -- especially John Murtha has called into question, you know, can we afford FCS and reset and all these other priorities at the same time.

So that being the case, you have talked about FCS being a sort of R&D strategy for increasing R&D investment. Wouldn't it be cheaper just to re-conceptualize this thing as a tech incubator?

GEN. SPEAKES: Well, the challenge right now is that we're at war, and soldiers at war need capability as fast as we can give it to them.

So, for example, right now if you take a look at 20,000 up- armored Humvees that are in theater today, virtually every one of them has FRAG Kit 5.

FRAG Kit 5 is the precursor armor technology that we're going to use on the manned ground vehicle.

When you take a look right now at the soldier who is using a robot to disarm an IED, they're using one of the primitive robots that is a part of our capability in future combat system.

The first point is the Army will not rest. If we have a capability that is needed in combat, we're not standing on ceremony; we're getting it out in the field as fast as we can.

The next point then is that we recognize the issue of affordability. And frankly, we operate on a budget, and as the deputy chief of staff for programs, my job is to build a budget and then make it something that provides for the total Army. In other words, from recruiting a soldier all the way through to training to housing to equipping, we have to produce a rounded budget. So let me talk in specific terms about that.

Right now, FCS, in the current budget that I have for fiscal years '09 and '10, for example, provides that we're using about one- third of our investment strategy for FCS. And then that one-third is, in turn, one-quarter of our overall budget.

So this is one-third of one-quarter of our total budget that I'm putting into future combat systems, on the direction of the Army leadership. So it's a little bit over three and a half billion dollars this year, for example. Three and a half billion dollars, out of a base budget of a little bit over $130 billion, just makes sense.

It's an investment in capability that the Army desperately needs. It's an investment in capability that we've found has direct relevance to our ability to fight this war today and tomorrow.

The other thing I'd make a mention of is that we fully understand and are adhering to Secretary Gates's guidance. What he said was don't get next-war-itis. You be focused on making sure that the capabilities you're fielding have a direct relationship and relevance to this fight. And our answer is, when you take a look at what FCS is delivering today in combat, whether it's the UAV, whether it's the robot, or it's the promise of the common ground vehicle, we think everything we're doing in FCS has a direct relationship to what soldiers in combat need today.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MS. KAISER: Christopher with Long War Journal.

Q Good morning, sir. I'd like to talk a little bit more about spin out number one, since it'll be the first proof of the ability to deliver capability.

Can you give us a little more detail on what capabilities are going to be delivered and maybe what units are going to be -- going to get this capability in fiscal year '11?

GEN. SPEAKES: Sure. Let me just talk you through what we're going to be doing. We're going to be putting sensors out that enable us to put a sensor in a position to identify whether we have enemy activity.

Those sensors operate both as a tactical sensor at the soldier level, and then link us through what we call an integrated computer system. And the integrated computer system enables us to then process the results of what's in that sensor, and then pass that -- in this case, through a spin out -- to the non-line-of-sight rockets-in-a-box that can shoot 40 kilometers.

So what you have then is a linkage between what we're seeing in the battlefield, detected by a sensor, the processing done through an integrated computer system, which is the computer that essentially links that sensor with a shooter, that then passes a fire mission to the rockets-in-a-box. This enables you to shoot a missile 40 kilometers, if you need to shoot that far to take out whatever it is that your sensor has seen.

So this is a simple example of what spin out one will give us, which is the ability now to empower, for example, potentially an infantry formation with capabilities that are far greater than a soldier with an M-16 rifle would ever hope of having.

MS. KAISER: Okay, Grant with Government Executive. Do you have a question?

Q Yes, I do.

General, I understand your rationale for the common platform and the maintenance savings and all you're getting through that. But FCS is still going to equip only a third, I think it is, of the total force and you'll still have light and heavy legacy systems. What is your plan for those platforms going forward, and how much of FCS, the network itself, will you migrate onto those legacy platforms? And if the network is the most important part, why are you putting so much investment into a new platform?

GEN. SPEAKES: Let me try to distinguish between the actual common platform and what we all the FCS brigade versus our concept of trying to extend the FCS capabilities across the force.

The Army of today is planned to be 76 combat brigades. That's active, Guard, and Reserve. Our plan right now is to extend through the network and through spin outs the basic qualities of FCS enablement across all of our fighting formations.

Our initial focus has been to go ahead and develop a spin out, which we're evaluating right now at Fort Bliss, and then once it passes the test and gains approval, to then go ahead and migrate it across the force a brigade at a time. And we'll try to do as many brigades a year as the budget will provide for us. And ultimately, what we do then is put these spin outs across all of our combat brigades, whether it's a light infantry organization, a Stryker brigade, or a heavy brigade.

The other part of FCS that was at the core of the original concept is the concept that the tank-Bradley combination which is now resident in a heavy brigade needs to be replaced with a modern common platform.

And what we'll do then is, our plan right now, is to replace 15 of the existing heavy combat brigades with an FCS brigade. That's the common platform; that's all the qualities that I talked about in this new hybrid electric powered vehicle that will now populate all the combat systems in a heavy brigade.

So what we'd see then is out of a total of 28 heavy brigades, 15 of them would now be FCS brigades. But the rest of the brigades in our Army will all have spin outs that give it the network, give it the sensors and shooters that enable them to operate at a much higher level than they're operating today.

MS. KAISER: Colin Clark with DOD Buzz, do you have a question?

Q I do.

General, thank you. My question is moderately cosmic. In the '80s and still today the Army built the big five and relies on the big five. If we look at FCS conceptually, do the eight variants become the new version of the big five, or -- part of this is conceptual. How do we look at the next version of the force?

GEN. SPEAKES: I think you've got a very useful framework. You rightly identified that in the '80s we fielded the big five to the Army. But if we take a look at how we did it, we were stuck with systems that were developed over time by different organizations and then harmonized in the battlefield.

In other words, as a member of one of those brigades in the '80s, I remember very well that one year I got the tank; two years later I got the Bradley; at the same time I had a new helicopter that we were just dealing with -- all of it with different mechanics that required special training, different manuals that we had to learn how to read and use and operate.

The concept now for FCS says that this new brigade, in one fell swoop, when we field it, will get eight variants at one time with one common set of capabilities, one common set of repair tools, one common set of mechanics who are able to operate all of the repair requirements across all eight.

By the way, if you take a look at the driver's position in this MGV, it's a common cockpit. In other words, whether you're sitting in the future artillery piece or the future scout vehicle, you have the same driver's requirements in terms of crew drill and basic situational awareness.

So all of this then promises that the Army will be much easier to operate, much easier to maintain and, we believe, much more effective. And so although there's a direct relationship between the big five in terms of inherent, revolutionary capabilities that we saw in the '80s, what we now see, as we look at this next decade when we bring the MGV in, what we're going to have is an exponential leap in capability. And that's what we see then as we look at the promise of FCS.

Q And one quick follow. The aerial component of this is only the UAVs, or you layer in -- what?

GEN. SPEAKES: The UAVs have a very important contribution, and right now we're talking about two kinds of UAVs. The class one, which is the micro air vehicle, we call the beer can.

Q Right.

GEN. SPEAKES: But it's a tactical level, platoon company level. And that's very important because it enables the lower echelon formation to have immediate situational awareness.

At the high end, then, what you have is (effectively ?) a small helicopter that is the class four UAV. It looks somewhat like the OH- 58 Kiowa does today, except smaller. What that does is not only give you the basic tools of seeing the battlefield, but it also gives you a sophisticated form of aerial retrans.

So as we talk about the network, what we're going to do is really empower -- or, enable the network with -- using aerial retrans, operating overhead, through this class four UAV. So now, as our formations spread across the land, they don't just rely on a satellite-based capability that is resident in satellites, but they also have immediate capabilities from an aerial layer that is operated by these class four UAV that is overhead.

Q But they'll still fight with Apaches and their brethren?

GEN. SPEAKES: Absolutely.

Q Okay.

GEN. SPEAKES: In other words, what we did in the course of aviation modernization over the last three or four years is make important new advancements to existing airframes by taking the Comanche decision and reflecting it in important upgrades --

Q Right.

GEN. SPEAKES: -- quality improvements to existing airframes.

So the familiar UH-60 Black Hawk, the A-64 Apache and the CH-47 medium-lift helicopter, all get important enhancements that enable it to continue to operate for the foreseeable future is a part of our aviation strategy, in collaboration with the FCS Brigades.

Q Thank you.

MS. KAISER: Bruce with Q&O.net, do you have a question?

Q Yes, thanks.

General, obviously the network is the core of this whole thing. Can you talk a little bit about how you see that network being protected in the FCS?

GEN. SPEAKES: Sure. I think the first point right now is that the network that we have that we're using in combat today has important limitations. It has been conceived essentially as a needs- of-war response. When I deployed with the 4th Infantry Division in 2003, we were the first network-enabled force. But what we had was a system that was based upon traditional stovepipe systems that were loosely integrated through what we call ABCS, or Army Battle Command Systems.

Now, as we look to what we're doing now with FCS, what's different? First, what we have now is an integrated system that was built joint and it was built as one unit, and that's one network instead of different proprietary systems that we have to try to link.

The next thing that we need to do is take a look at the transport layers. What we'll have is three layers that are mutually reinforcing and provide us redundancy. We'll have a tactical layer that is a ground layer that essentially is resident in ground combat vehicles. We'll have an aerial layer which is carried by UAVs operating overhead. And we'll have a satellite layer that is operating out of the satellite-based network.

All three, then, are complementary and mutually reinforcing. They're also mobile and portable in a way that is very, very important. So this network now will enable a point of presence in the network to have the visibility of the rest of the network.

So instead of moving point-to-point situational awareness, which is what we're doing today, we'll now have the ability to enter the network and essentially acquire any capability across the network. We'll be able to download; so important in terms of flexibility, important in terms of situational awareness, and also in sharing information that will enable us to be safer and better on the battlefield.

MS. KAISER: Brad with Brad's Place, do you have a question?

Q Yes, I do.

Good afternoon, General. Thank you for talking to us today. The secretary, in his remarks to the Heritage Foundation on May 13th, on Tuesday, actually kind of called out the FCS program, saying that it really needs to make sure that everything it's putting through FCS, the Army is putting through FCS, needs to be applicable not just for future combat but also what we're going through today.

What have you actually done to ensure him that what you are doing is applicable for every form of combat?

GEN. SPEAKES: I think the question that he has posed has been very important for the Army. And what he has essentially said is don't get next-war-itis. Focus on ensuring that the capabilities you're delivering have relevance today. And so, viewed through that prism, we look at Future Combat Systems and we feel very, very confident that we can answer him and the rest of the nation that the capabilities that we see in FCS have a direct relationship to the battlefield we're fighting today.

What are they? First of all, improved situational awareness. He has been very focused, I think, as you know, on ISR, or, as we call it, RISTA, the ability, through recon surveillance and target acquisition, to acquire better situational awareness and better enable and protect soldiers.

He has also been very focused on ensuring that we do a much better job of soldier protection. We think the Future Combat System does that in a variety of ways, both in the sense that we are passive, we're better able to pick up the battlefield and understand it, but also through active measures that we're better able to interdict and intercept those who wish to do us harm.

And then I think the other point that is very, very important is that the capabilities that we're seeing in FCS, when we've rushed them to the battlefield, have been immediately the source of enthusiastic response from soldiers in combat. So we think that when the secretary of Defense was talking,

that frankly we were directly responding to him with both what FCS is doing today and what we promise to do tomorrow.

Q It's Colin Clark (sp). Could I ask sort of a side to that?

MS. : Can I go through the other list of questions? Q Sure, sure.

MS. KAISER: And then I'll try to get back to you.

Jason with Armchair Journalist, are you on the line?

Q Yes, I am. Thank you.

Sir, I'm a fan of the Future Combat Systems. I've been watching it. And I hope you retain the chemical detection systems in the scout vehicle at the least, since the chemical version of the FCS has been knocked off the list.

My question is, given the concerns, I think, David Axe has mentioned as far as the cost schedule performances, can you describe any specific steps and project management that will help ensure that FCS doesn't impose or doesn't fall astray of the Nunn-McCurdy breach?

GEN. SPEAKES: For everybody here, Nunn-McCurdy means essentially that we maintain on cost performance and schedule, that we don't have a challenge in terms of our ability to deliver the products on the time lines that are asked or the cost that is required.

Right now we're very, very confident that the management and leadership that we have within the Army has got a very, very close attention to performance, that we're watching costs very carefully. And so we're proud to say that we believe right now FCS, under Army leadership, operating in direct response to Army leadership guidance, is delivering the products we expect, when we want it, at the cost that is affordable and is appropriate. We'll continue to do that. And the other thing is, through a series of reports, we are, of course, required and intend to be visible to the rest of the defense establishment about what those costs and performance measures are. So I'm confident to report right now that we're doing what we're saying, and at this point that we'll continue to do that.

Q Thank you.

MS. KAISER: Graham with Blackfive.

Q Thank you. I would like to ask a little bit about how the network will support the intelligence side of the ISR. I've heard a lot about the surveillance, the recon, the targeting side, but in terms of access to the prodigious databases of intelligence that we're building from day to day, what kind of capacity will this give the soldier in the field?

GEN. SPEAKES: It's a great question, and let me just put your question in perspective. What we're finding today is that an intelligence database that is isolated from the battlefield is simply not useful or effective. Let me use a couple of examples. In today's battlefield, it's the soldier at a checkpoint who is enabled with biometrics -- and let me put it in perspective -- so that I can take a thumb print of somebody who comes through a checkpoint, run that thumb print on a scanner, and run that against our database to see if we get a

hit on that thumb print or not, or that we get a visual image of somebody's face and we run that against a similar database. That's the test that we're finding is the actual test of utility in today's combat environment.

So what we have to do, then, is ensure that we're developing the capabilities in FCS to do that. The answer that we're seeing increasingly is a couple of things. First, we need to be able to put that soldier into the network. This is not a capability that is going to be resident at the brigade or the battalion level and be useful. We have to run the ability to get that information out to the soldier on a checkpoint to be effective.

The second thing we have to have is, whatever point of presence that soldier is has to be connected. So it's not just a soldier that we connect, but it's almost literally any soldier who's equipped with the particular hardware in this case to be able to operate.

The distributed common-ground station is a key concept for all of this.

That is the plan and the program that is inherent to FCS. Through Distributed Common Ground Station, what we're saying there is that we're able to take a variety of sensors and we're able to download them all in one place so that the soldier has access to the information. The challenge today is that we're still, as I mentioned earlier -- the word I use is "point to point" -- that we're still moving information today; what we're not able to do is mass it effectively as we would like.

And so what we'll see with FCS is much more ability to move information to the soldier level and to move more than one item of information to the soldier level but to bring whatever he or she needs. So that concept, then, of passing information and moving information to the lowest point of presence in the network, the soldier, which is the highest payoff, is inherent in FCS.

I'd also mention something very, very important. That we have seen that what we call Ground Soldier System has been a concept that is borne out in combat in Baghdad. Ground Soldier System that in combat today, a combat infantryman can carry around, essentially on his or her back, the capability to enter the network, to be able to be populating what we call a common operating picture, and to be knowable to those that operate at higher headquarters. That's really, really important for us because we've proved now as a concept that we can put the soldier in the network, we're doing it on a mobile battlefield, and now what we have to do is work backwards to ensure that we are able to bring that into a more refined Army program that will bring this capability across the rest of the Army.

So all these, then, are a way of assuring you that we understand the importance of getting the soldier connected, that we have to have the actual technology that delivers that, which we're seeing in combat today, and that we can deliver it through stable, mature Army programs across the rest of the Army over time.

Q Thank you.

MS. KAISER: Was there anyone who joined the call late who I forgot?

Q It's Colin Clark. Can I jump in?

MS. KAISER: Sure.

Q General, I have a very specific one for you. The HASC told you they're going to let 200 million (dollars). Granted, they're not appropriators, but they can make your life interesting. The Senate said, okay, here's your dough. What's your specific answer to the concerns the House raised, namely that they're funding the parts that matter and the 200 million (dollars) won't really make a difference to you?

GEN. SPEAKES: Colin, I think that's a great question. The first point I think I'd respond with is this is an integrated program. You can't break it apart and maintain the unique synergy that we're bringing to the fight. We need the ability to deliver an integrated capability, but we have to have the spin-outs. We have to have the network that supports it.

We have to have the robotics that are inherent in separating the soldier from those who wish to do him or her harm. We need the next generation of common platforms that will enable us to replace the Cold War legacy stuff that we're fighting right now, that we see the need to improve.

And so our answer is, judge us by the overall intent of the program, by our ability to deliver on time, on target what it is that we say we'll deliver, and then ask the soldiers who are testing it now to testify to the utility of this in the modern battlefield.

We believe all of that says that we have a very compelling case, that we're being very honest and open about what we're delivering and, when we have a problem, what the issues and challenges are with delivering this revolutionary technology to the battlefield.

Q And are you bringing soldiers in to talk to them or showing them testimonials or --

GEN. SPEAKES: Very much so. And very, very important to our concept now has been during the spring we've taken important members of Congress --

Q This was Saxton and company who went out to Fort Bliss?

GEN. SPEAKES: We were privileged to have Congressman Saxton, Congressman Abercrombie, among -- two among many who have gone out. And then what we demonstrated was the capabilities that our spin-out (won ?) in a notional tactical setting, where they could see the value of this version of the network, the value of common situational awareness, the value of the sensors and the shooters, and bringing it all together.

So we think that's the most important thing we can do now, is say we're out of the world of the PowerPoint slide; we're now into the world of reality on the ground at Fort Bliss, Texas, being evaluated and used by soldiers who are combat veterans.

And then we're asking our leadership to judge based on merits of the capabilities they are seeing.

Q And what kind of reaction are you getting from the staff since markup?

GEN. SPEAKES: We believe that people are enthusiastic about the program as they see capabilities in the hands of soldiers. And we'll continue

to expose people to those capabilities in the hands of soldiers and believe that we can make our case and win.

Q Okay. Good luck. (Laughs.)

GEN. SPEAKES: Thank you. We'll need every -- yes. And frankly, part of what we have to do is reach out, through leaders like you of this media, to see if we can make our case, because we recognize the importance of it, and we recognize the need for public support.

MS. KAISER: Are there any other last-minute questions?

Q Yes. General, Craig Grant here. One quick follow-up. Are you stuck on the design of the ground vehicle in the sense of -- are you willing to revisit the kind of the wheels versus tracks? I know that one of the vulnerabilities of Abrams and Bradleys is that with the track layout, the (hull/hole ?) is so low to the ground and forms a bit of a gas trap there. Is that something you're willing to revisit going forward?

GEN. SPEAKES: I think the point would be right now that the design of that vehicle is being continuously updated and revised and adjusted as we see the lessons of combat. So the platform that we designed in concept several years ago is substantially different than what we're putting on the ground today in this first prototype and we'll continue to evolve.

At this point, a track suspension makes enormous sense, given the need for mobility across a variety of maneuver environments.

You and I know the problem which is, wheeled vehicles work in a majority of the terrains that we can see. But there are substantial areas of the world where a wheeled vehicle could get us in trouble. So what we want right now is a track vehicle.

You correctly addressed the issue of, do we have the kind of separation that could shield us from the underground explosives? That's an issue that we're taking on. And we're taking it on with a variety of capabilities and technologies that essentially is an update to the design that the original vehicle came with.

So for example, if you take a look at the driver's cockpit now, what we have is a different seating system that separates the shock of the underground explosion from the actual soldier who is now seated in the driver's seat.

Those are just illustrative of the kinds of things that we're doing. We have put additional work into essentially an underbody capability that will give us more defense against the underground explosives.

So those are evolutions of the design that we believe in; that we continue to believe have enormous merit. But we're also smart enough to see that the battlefield changes. And we need to update or revise the design to accommodate.

Q So we could see a wheeled version of the FCS vehicle at some point perhaps.

GEN. SPEAKES: I don't see it at this point, because we don't see the need to. In other words, we can grow or evolve the track vehicle to meet the requirements of the combat environment that we're seeing today and tomorrow.

Q Gotcha. Thank you.

MS. KAISER: Anything else.

Q Yeah. I've got one more. It's Noah Schachtman with Wired again.

General, early operational requirements documents for FCS talked about FCS being optimized for major combat operations. Is that still the case? Is FCS still sort of focused on major combat operations or has there been a shift?

GEN. SPEAKES: We intend to operate FCS across the spectrum of conflict. In other words, we call it a full-spectrum capability. So we recognize that in today's operating environment we have to be able to go from something as simple as -- or as relatively benign as -- situations of peacekeeping environment to counterinsurgency, which is what we're dealing with now, to potentially major combat operations. That's the challenge and that's the -- to find the sweet spot in capabilities that enables us to move across the spectrum. We think we're doing it.

MS. KAISER: Any last --

Q Is it -- sorry. But is it still -- even in these early operational requirements documents, it talked about full spectrum, but it said it was optimized for major combat. Is that still the case, that it's optimized for major combat?

GEN. SPEAKES: I would say that when you take a look at the changes, or the evolution of the systems that I'm talking about now, what you've seen is that the threat that you and I recognize as valid and troubling in today's combat situation doesn't really fit the spectrum of just major combat. Example: Do you think that an IED is something that'll be restricted to only one setting in today's combat environment? The answer is no.

We think that in major combat operations, we can see an IED. We also think at the other end of the spectrum, in peacekeeping, we could see an IED. So when we talk about continuing to evolve or grow this design, what we want to do is ensure that we're addressing likely threats which now could occur across the spectrum of conflict and be able to respond to them, so that we're not solely comfortable or resident in one environment of the combat spectrum.

Q Sir, it's Colin Clark. It sounds like you're saying you will be able to have your cake and eat it too and that you're not subject to "next war-itis" but trying to bridge both.

GEN. SPEAKES: Absolutely.

Q Okay.

GEN. SPEAKES: And we don't regard that as having your cake and eating it too. We would be foolish, as an Army right now that has over 20-plus brigades in combat in Iraq alone, to think that we can content ourselves with future improvements that we can deliver next decade. The pressure is on us to deliver. The pressure is on us to make the capabilities that we're talking

about and make them real and make them viable to soldiers who are going to say, "This is what I need."

We think we're answering that test, and it's a very, very important test. Because if we can't meet that test, then we shouldn't be doing what we're doing. And so we don't think that the guidance that the secretary of Defense has given us is anything other than, frankly, great and applied common sense. We ought to be doing this, and we think we are.

Q Okay.

MS. KAISER: I think that will wrap it up.

We're already pushing and extending over the time that we warned General Speakes about. So we appreciate -- (short audio break) -- his time for this.

Since a lot of you are talking about FCS capabilities, there is a demonstration on Capitol Hill, on the National Mall, next Wednesday. So those of you in the D.C. area --

Q So you guys are going to take out the Capitol? (Laughter.)

MS. KAISER: June 11. June 11, so tell your readers. I'll send you all an e-mail so you know what's going on there. But certainly it's going to be open to the public, so we want people to learn about that.

But thank you for everyone who was on the call. Thank you, Jack Holt, for hosting and all of your assistance. And thank you especially Lieutenant General Speakes for the interview.

MR. HOLT: All right. And thank you, General Speakes. And if you guys have any follow-up questions, you've got my e-mail address. Just send them to me, I will forward them on up to Lindy, and we'll get you engaged there as well.

Q So that was April 11th for the FCS demo?

MS. KAISER: June. June. June 11th.

Q Don't know why I heard April.

GEN. SPEAKES (?): This is the current fight, not the next fight. (Laughter.)

MS. KAISER: I will send you the information.

Q Thank you very much.

MS. KAISER: Thank you.

Q And I can't wait to see them take the Capitol.

END.